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Neglected Arabia





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THE BUSRAH MINARET

# NEGLECTED ARABIA

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# Neglected Arabia

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## Three Visits to Jiddah

REV. S. M. ZWEMER, DD., LL.D., F.R.G.S.



REV. S. M. ZWEMER, D.D., LL.D.

For thirteen centuries Jiddah has been the most important harbour in the Moslem world from a religious standpoint. Its foundations were laid in the year 26 A.H. by the Caliph Othman, who chose it as the harbour of Mecca. But the town never reached commercial importance because of its natural disadvantages on the one hand, and the intermittent character of its only traffic, namely, that in pilgrims, on the other. Ibn Jubair gives a picture of the town as it appeared in 1183 with its rude huts and stone buildings, its walls and its mosques. The town has shared in the fortunes and misfortunes of the Caliphate; it has often been besieged by the Bedouins, and was attacked by the Portuguese in 1541 and besieged by the Wahabis in 1803. In 1840

Egyptian rule began, but when the English and French consuls and other Christians were massacred on 15 June, 1858, the place was bombarded on July 25 of the same year by the British. Since then the importance of Jiddah has steadily declined, except as a landing place for pilgrims and the gateway into Mecca.

My first visit to Jiddah was in January, 1891, when I went out to Arabia after learning some Arabic in Syria and Egypt. The Rev. Thomas Valpy French, first Bishop of Lahore and pioneer missionary to Arabia, was a fellow-passenger on the Khedivial steamer by which we sailed from Suez. The first port we touched at, after three days' journey, was Jiddah. It was my first glimpse of Arabia, and, seen from the harbour, the town presented a very picturesque view. The



MOSQUE AT JIDDAH

principal port of the Hedjaz and the harbour of Mecca, from which it is only thirty-seven miles distant, it is an important centre. The harbour is within coral reefs, which also yield the building stone for the walls and dwellings of the city. The houses are high, generally four or five stories, and the carved lattice-work of rare and beautiful patterns, in dark woods, contrasts finely with the pure white coral rock. The whole city was at that time surrounded by a wall, pierced by several massive gates. The picturesque disappeared, however, on closer acquaintance. We landed at the Custom House, and without much difficulty obtained permission to visit the town. The streets are dark and narrow, and are the sole receptacles for all the filth of the houses,



which is thrown or carried out and buried or left uncovered in front of them.

From the general market place through the coffee market, and past the elegant palaces of the Sherif, we went outside the walls to visit the celebrated tomb of Eve, the grandmother of us all, after whom the town is named *jiddah*, or grandmother. The Mohammedans say that when Adam and Eve were cast down from Paradise, Adam fell on the isle of Ceylon and Eve near Jiddah, and that after a separation of 200 years Adam was, on his repentance, conducted by the angel Gabriel to a mountain near Mecca, where he found and knew his wife, the mountain being then named Arafat (recognition). The large enclosure with a building at each end and over the middle of her body now marks the resting place of the mother of all living. According to the traditions, she was of giant proportions, and in proof the Amazonian grave measures 110 paces in length. This tomb is sacred, and has become a great resort for the sick, who tie shreds of their garments on the iron railings of the enclosure.

Jiddah, even at that time, was beginning to feel the throb of a new civilization. The shops boasted Sheffield razors, American sewing machines, Swiss watches, English textiles, and petroleum from the Alleghanies. There was much fanaticism, and no Christian was allowed to go outside the Mecca gate, except to visit the tomb of Eve, and even this was only possible under Turkish guard. Bibles and books were confiscated at the custom houses, and no Christian could walk the streets without feeling that he was considered by all an unwelcome Kafir. It is true that Bishop French, protected by his grey hairs and simple faith, went on shore by himself during our short stay here and read his Arabic Bible to eager listeners; but it was a bold step, taken against the advice of all those who knew the character of the people and the danger of fanaticism. He himself told the story as follows in a letter to Mrs. French:—

“I put an Arabic Bible in each of my large pockets, and so ventured forth. I got two occasions to give short Arabic addresses within the city, one in a learned old mullah’s house, whom I induced to invite me in, and listen to the story of God’s plan of salvation. The other opportunity was in a more open space, sitting on the door-step of an old blind man, whose friends gathered round to listen. The mullah wished to have the Bible, so I left it with him. I seldom leave the New Testament without the Psalms and Prophets, though our American brethren and most missionaries in India are content with the New Testament only, for its convenient size, partly, also from incorrect views (as I think) of the relation between the Old and New Testament, the Law and the Gospel. Three years ago General Haig entered the town with a bag of Bibles, which were all taken from him and never returned. This I avoided, filling my pockets only while my hands looked most innocently empty.”

The Bishop imagined that he was able to pass undistinguished in the crowd: “I wore a black fez (which is the mourning dress of the Turks) in my walk in Jiddah alone yesterday, and something like the white Tunisian burnous down to the feet, so that I really think they

scarcely took me for a foreigner," but I remember well how the visit was afterwards talked about by the people on shore and by our fellow-passengers.

It was twenty-two years later that I again visited Jiddah, coming from Egypt with Mr. C. T. Hooper, the agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society. Twenty-two years of Turkish misrule and Arab intrigue followed by the *coup-d'état* of the Young Turks and the new constitutional régime. We went on a tour of investigation to discover possibilities of selling the Word of God where every other commodity, including Scotch whiskey, Austrian playing cards, and American cigarettes, found a ready market. On the day of Livingstone's centenary, 19 March, 1913, we arrived at Yenbo, the port of Medina, and although we only had a few hours on shore, we met a Moslem inquirer who was deeply interested, and had actually given himself a Christian name in his desire to fulfil the commandments of Christ as recorded in the Gospel. I shall never forget our mutual surprise to find hospitality in this inquirer's house nor the sense we had of God's real presence when we prayed together in the upper room.

The following day we left Yenbo, arriving at Jiddah on Good Friday. A special omen of hope and cheer greeted us as our ship dropped anchor: all the flags over the various consulates were at half-mast, and although some of the passengers thought it signified the death of a notable or some European ruler, the dragomans and other Arabs who crawled up the ship's sides to greet their pilgrim friends soon gave us the reason. They said, "It is the day on which Jesus died." It seems that one of the consuls having put his flag at half-mast, the others followed his example. What a testimony to the historicity of the Crucifixion in Moslem Arabia among those who deny it! The Union Jack itself, whether at half-mast or at the top, always displays the glory of the Cross. Is it a mere coincidence that over 90,000,000 Moslems enjoy the protection of that flag which recalls the story of Saint Andrew, of Saint Patrick, and of Saint George, who by martyrdom, by missions, or by chivalry showed their devotion to our Saviour?

Our errand was not as difficult as we had expected. The Young Turks were in power, customs restrictions were less severe, and there was an atmosphere of tolerance that I had not expected. We remained for five days and saw much of the little town. The British Consul was friendly, and others also showed us kindness. We met an earnest man, who said, "It is hard to be a Christian at Jiddah." Indeed the loneliness and the downward pull of such an environment soon tell on character unless it be founded on the very Rock. On Easter Sunday, thanks to the kindness and hospitality of the British Consul, a simple service was held for Europeans to set forth the resurrection power of Christ—thirty-six miles from Mecca! When we left Jiddah we had secured the rent of a small house; a colporteur with his stock of books dwelt there, and for some period, until the heat became too great, he pursued his work with encouragement and without serious opposition.

Our most interesting experience, perhaps, during this visit was in the matter of photographs. The prejudice in most Moslem lands against the camera and pictures has not yet died down; but in Jiddah it seemed photographs were on sale during the pilgrim season. I was able not only to take some good photographs myself and learn particulars in regard to the pilgrim traffic, but sent a telegram to Mecca to a leading Moslem photographer, whose establishment is not far from the Ka'aba itself, and received by registered post a number of beautiful photographs which I was glad afterwards to share with the readers of the "National Geographic Magazine" (August, 1917).

My third visit was quite unexpected. Last October, when returning from a visit to China, the French mail steamer called at Jiddah to accommodate some Moslem notables from North Africa returning from pilgrimage. A glimpse was then given us of Jiddah, not under Abdul Hamid nor under the Young Turks, but under the government of the new king of Arabia. Events have moved rapidly since the declaration of independence in the Hedjaz. It hardly seemed like the same town, and certainly not like the same backward government of the Turks. Instead of landing from the anchorage in the outer harbour by sailing ships through the surf, steam launches met us. Most of the passengers went on shore to see the sights as freely as they would at Aden or Port Said. The king of the Hedjaz has reformed many of the abuses of the Turkish régime. Pilgrims now pay, so I was assured, no more than thirty-six shillings a day for the first three days' lodgings in Jiddah, and afterwards eighteen shillings, compared with the eight to ten pounds sterling formerly! The charge for a camel for the journey from Jiddah to Mecca and Arafat and back is now three to five pounds sterling compared with ten pounds in the old days. The luggage of pilgrims is well looked after, and everything is done for their comfort. Water is given free to poor pilgrims and sold very cheaply to others.

The road between Jiddah and Mecca, formerly infested with brigands, is now quite safe even for pedestrians. Bedouin police accompany the travellers from one police station in the road to another, and all pilgrims are free to stay in Mecca after the Haj, or go anywhere they like, whereas formerly the Government used to keep pilgrims at Mecca for at least a fortnight after the Haj, so that they might spend all their money. Several primary schools and a military school were opened in Mecca a year ago; primary schools have also been started in Jiddah. An agricultural and geological school will be opened, we were told, for the Arab Government has sent to Egypt and elsewhere for professors and teachers. The king has encouraged teachers of theology and expounders of the traditions of Mohammed in the sanctuary of Mecca. Three courses of religious instruction are already given daily on the lines of that given at Al Azhar University in Cairo. There is still plenty of room for improvement in sanitation, but the newly organized municipalities of Jiddah and Mecca are endeavouring to keep the towns clean. Incinerators have been established and also a hospital. The Public Works Department is rapidly widening the streets of Mecca, and steps are also being taken to improve the

customs service. The Government is also planning the planting of trees in Jiddah; the post office now sells Meccan stamps; a big weekly paper called "Al Kible" gives news of the war; and finally a telephone service connects Jiddah with the capital city of Mecca.

When we think of all these changes, of the expulsion of the Turks, and the establishment of a new government, the future of Arabia from an economical and political standpoint seems to be promising for the welfare of the people. May we not hope that their highest welfare will also result from these far-reaching changes? Burton's prophecy written in 1855 may yet be accomplished. He said: "The Eastern world moves slowly—*appur si muove.*" Half a generation ago steamers were first started to Jiddah; now we hear of a projected railway from that port to Mecca, the shareholders being all Moslems. And the example of Jerusalem encourages us to hope that long before the end of the century a visit to Mecca will not be more difficult than a trip to Hebron.—*Church Missionary Review*, London, June, 1918.

## A Trip up the Tigris

(Under the Old Régime)

REV. EDWIN E. CALVERLEY



AMARA: OUT-STATION ON THE TIGRIS, 150 MILES ABOVE BASRAH

There were two steamship lines operating on the Tigris River between Busrah and Baghdad before the war; one was Turkish and the other British. The Turks have in all probability made their last trip up the river in charge of their own steamers, so that some of the experiences travellers had a few years ago will very likely never be repeated.

We were to leave Busrah for Amara, halfway to Baghdad. The boats of the Turkish line were newer than the British steamers, but they were not cleaner. They also had the usual oriental disadvantage of irregularity, as the only schedule they started on was "after a while," and there was no telling when or whether they would arrive. But the missionaries could get lower rates on the Turkish steamers, since the mission hospital often cared for the officials and employees of the Turkish government, to which the steamers belonged. So we decided to wait for the Turkish boat and enjoy the taste of native travel.

The boat was crowded and meals were served in two sections. At our table were some young Turkish officers of European education, and another Turk to whom western ways were new. The latter could not enjoy his meal, as he was evidently using a knife and fork for the first time. He had my sympathy, as I remembered the difficulty I had eating my first Arab meal with my fingers. He finally ordered the Arab steward to cut up his meat and vegetables. Then he tackled his plate-full with a spoon, with entire success, for the Arabs make use of wooden spoons.

The dinner was served in courses, but all the plates were put on the table at once. As we finished the soup, we found a plate beneath for the fish. One does not expect ship porcelain to be of the egg-shell variety, and these dishes certainly were not, unless there are egg shells nearly half an inch thick. The dishes were, however tastefully decorated with the Turkish seal with the ship's name in Arabic underneath.

One of the Turkish officials took us to his cabin to show us his photographs and ask some questions about his camera. He did not seem to mind that pictures were forbidden by his Prophet. When we returned we found the others had been imbibing what was also forbidden by the Prophet. Things good and bad from the west were evidently breaking down the Prophet's influence.

The Tigris River scenes are full of interest. This interest is not of the archaeological type except near Baghdad. Nearer Busrah there are only two places known to early history or legend. At Kurna, the Moslems claim, is the only original Garden of Eden, with a Tree of Knowledge which not even they claim to be the original one. Further up the river is the Tomb of Ezra, which is a place of pilgrimage for the Jews. Ezra is in bad repute among the Moslems, as their Koran says that the Jews proclaim him as the Son of God, just as the Christians say that Jesus is. But I have yet to meet a Moslem who claims to have heard a Jew make such a statement about Ezra.

For 150 miles north of Busrah the river banks are lined with millions of date palms, every one of which was taxed by the Constantinople government. We wondered at the wealth of the country. But when we went on the upper deck we could look over the tree-tops and see the desert beyond. Only a narrow strip on either bank is cultivated, and we marveled then at the poverty of wisdom and ability of the government and people that would make so little use of such valuable land with water so near. Date groves will displace desert scrubs with the departure of the Turks as the rulers of Iraq.

Further up the river the palm trees are entirely absent. Wheat, barley and rice fields are seen, as well as frequent villages of Arabs. These Arabs look to be a savage lot, and they are. That their religion sits lightly upon them is obvious at first glance, for their women are not veiled. The men are not careful about keeping clothed at all. The houses they live in are goat-hair tents or mat huts. Occasionally what they consider permanent houses, made entirely of mud, are seen. The sides of these mud houses are the fuel bins of the country, for they are inartistically decorated with buffalo chips, squashed there to dry in the sun.

Buffaloes are the main support of life for the Arabs. The animals live cheaply, as they secure much of their food from the river, for they eat the river grasses and the tender roots of the reeds. Preserved milk is not a civilized invention, for the Arabs dry the excess of milk that their buffaloes give them, and carry it with them on their journeys.

The river people are a mixture of the settled and roving Arabs. They are agriculturalists during the winter and spring, when the rains and high river irrigate their crops. The rest of the year they move from place to place with their flocks. They should not be called "wandering" Arabs, for all the tribes know the round of their journeying. The constant fights of the desert result when one tribe purposely "wanders" after the water wells and grazing grounds of another.

There is no tribe in all Arabia with as ill a repute for treachery and villainy as these Ma'dan Arabs of Lower Mesopotamia. They combine the worst features of the town and desert people. Utterly illiterate they are, and ignorant of any world but their own. Of their religion they know only the faults, and their fanaticism has robbed them of the elsewhere universal virtue of the Arabs, an ungrudging and unquestioning hospitality. The Ma'danies have no welcome for other than their own kind. The first missionaries, teachers or doctors, to live among them will be more than heroes; they may be martyrs.

When we reached Amara we stopped off for several weeks. Later we continued the journey up the river. This time we travelled "deck," which is the steerage of the tropics. On board were some Persian sayyids, descendants of the Prophet. Their father was custodian of the Mosque of Husayn at Kerbela. They were very friendly and invited us to visit them at Kerbela. This is the place of greatest pilgrimage for the Shiah, or heretic Moslems. Husayn, the Prophet's grandson, was slain in battle there, and became the martyr-hero of his followers. Every pilgrim adds dignity to his name and is called "Kerbely." We met these same sayyids later at Sheikh Saad, where they were on a begging tour. They were not so cordial then as they thought the people would criticise association with us "infidels."

In Sheikh Saad I heard a new Arabian proverb. Most of the inhabitants were Shiah. The others were three Sunnis, or orthodox Moslems, two Jews and half a dozen Sabeans or Mesopotamian star-worshippers. We were avoided by the Shiah at first, but welcomed by each of the other groups. In explanation of our different reception, one said, "*Ghuriba, sudika*"—"Foreigners together are friends together." It seems to be true everywhere.

We lodged in the khan, the town's only brick dwelling. There we received visits from the other foreigners, and presently the Shiah called to discuss the news of the world. We found that the Shiah when alone with us would partake of our tea and toast. When strangers came they maintained their scruples and refused our merely formal invitations. Later we were invited to their *majlises*, or gatherings. Here special cups were set apart for us when coffee was served. These cups were afterwards washed of the contamination of our lips. In older times and still in some places the Shiah would have broken the cups.

One day we saw an interesting stranger. He was tall and strong and dressed in the black garments which the religious Persians wear in their constant mourning for their slain Husayn. He had a heavy iron ring around his neck. This pious Persian, we learned, was a murderer, and was to be punished, not by hanging or imprisonment, but by paying his victim's family a large sum of money. He could raise this sum more quickly by begging than by working, and the collar was to remain until the sum was paid. This money ransom is a recognized method of expiating crime in the Orient whenever the injured family agrees. Political offenders, however, may not get off so easily. The ruler of an Arab city within the last few years heard that one of his subjects was conspiring against him. Before the man could do anything the sheikh arrested him, and put him in a dark, dirty prison until he thought he had enough evidence. The British consul of the place learned of the case and did not believe the man was a conspirator. Before he could interfere, the sheikh gave his orders to his soldiers. These got a long wrought-iron nail, such as the Arabs use in building their boats. They held this nail over a fire until it was red hot. Then they went to the prisoner and jabbed the nail, first in one eye, and then in the other. After a year the prisoner was released, as such offenders usually are, to be a horrible example to the people.

One night in Sheikh Saad our new friends took us to their *majlis* and regaled us on dates and milk, cheese and coffee. Then they brought out the town poet, and I have seldom had a more interesting time. Not like our singers did he perform, nor in any tones that would win him western favor did he sing. He turned his head to one side and held his head in his hands and wailed and whined and shed tears as his words fell from his lips. Then they started an Arabian frolic, "*hosa mal Arab*," they called it. It was really a war dance. They got their guns and loaded them with cartridges from which they had removed the lead. Then one of them turned clown. He removed his lower garments and arranged his shirt to form a loin-cloth. Then he started singing and danced to his rhythm. We never knew before that the dignified Arabs could find fun in such behaviour. They joined in the singing and kept time by clapping their hands. The dancer went round and round, and back and forth, singing louder and jumping higher. Then as the excitement increased, off went the guns, filling the whole room with smoke and echoes. They kept up the singing and shot off the guns again and again until the burly Arab, worn out by his exertions, had to cease the dancing. Then suddenly the party came to an end. A messenger rushed in, saying that a door of the khan had been found open and that a room had evidently been ransacked.

We all ran out and found that the room belonged to Ahmad, one of those entertaining us. All easily removable goods had been stolen—clothes, belts, revolver, blankets, and money. With the things had disappeared an Arab that had shared the room with the owner. This Arab was a stranger. He had come to town but a week or so before, poorly clothed, penniless and hungry. He told his tale to Ahmad, who fed and clothed him and gave him a place to sleep. The stranger said he was an embroiderer of belts, so Ahmad bought him cloth and numerous skeins of colored silks. More than all the unmatched hospitality of

the Arab, Ahmad bestowed upon him, and now the stranger had disappeared with all he could carry away. Searching parties went up and down and across the river and back into the desert, but not a sign of the scoundrel was seen.

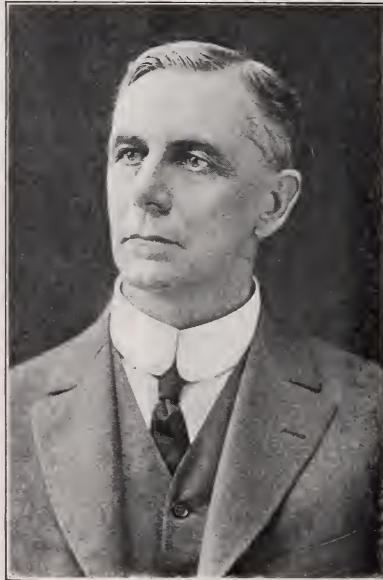
It would be correct to instance Ahmad as a shining example of the Arab host, but it would not be fair to say that the stranger was a typical Arab. Robbery is a recognized trade among the Arabs, and even pretending to be a needy traveller is allowable when a *ghazu*, or raid, is planned. But such individual treachery against your own host is outside the accepted laws of the desert. All parties in the town denounced the robbery, and it would have gone hard with the culprit had he been found.

Our trip up the Tigris had given us half a dozen sidelights on Arab and Persian character.

## Y. M. C. A. Work Among Soldiers in Mesopotamia

REV. JAMES CANTINE, D.D.

(Owing to the uncertainty and irregularity of mail service, this article appears in print a year after it was written.—*Editor.*)



REV. JAMES CANTINE, D.D.

The missionaries in the Busrah field have been accustomed for many years to think of themselves as the only ones engaged in active evangelistic work in all this vast region. One of the agreeable surprises that met me when I came back from furlough a few months ago was to find that other Christian workers had reached Mesopotamia,



and that the best and highest interests of the many thousands of soldiers in camp and field, both British and Indian, were being systematically cared for. Not alone did the military occupation of this part of Arabia mean the marshalling of many and great forces for destruction, but also the bringing in of many men and many agencies whose aim was righteousness and right living, with all that follows of comfort and happiness. When I left Busrah, not long after the first arrival of the troops, our Sunday afternoon service was about the only place where those who wished could meet for worship; now our modest little notice in the Saturday paper is crowded by a dozen or more calling attention to religious services at various centres. Army chaplains just out from home land from transports a half dozen at a time, and until it is remembered how many regiments there are scattered up and down the two rivers, one wonders what they all can find to do. It has been a pleasure to us to meet a few of these men socially, but other ways our lines seldom cross.

This article is an attempt to give our readers some idea of another organized Christian work among the troops in which we missionaries are able to be of some assistance, and which especially appeals to us through former associations in the home land. I refer to the Army Young Men's Christian Association. There are several centres of Y. M. C. A. work about Busrah, in hospitals, camps, barracks and city, and numerous Secretaries, who, though dressed in the universal khaki, can generally be recognized by the red triangle on their sleeves. When I say that I sat down to a Thanksgiving dinner with six or eight of them it will be recognized that a goodly number of them are Americans. The last report stated that there was an effective working force in Mesopotamia of forty-eight. A number of these are Indians with the Indian troops, but a majority are from the States and Canada, young men just out of college, most of them short-term men—in missionary parlance—giving themselves to a special need for a limited time. They are men worth knowing, all of them, and fine representatives of our home institutions. Among them are several missionaries from India, taking a short vacation from institutional work in their own fields.

There must be about fifty centres in which Y. M. C. A. work is done, from Busrah to Baghdad on the Tigris, and up the Euphrates, three or four, perhaps, in old houses adapted to that purpose, but most in tents, or mat huts. Here the soldier, if tired and hungry, will always find tea and coffee, biscuits and more solid refreshments at a nominal price. If it is company and relaxation he needs, there are games of various kinds, and an evening programme of lectures, concerts and cinema shows. Stationery for writing is always to be had for the asking, and, best of all, he knows that in the Secretary there is a friend to whom he may go in all difficulties. "Hymn-sings," Bible classes and evening prayers give the Christian men a chance to meet together, and

to many who are not, their best chance of hearing what a living faith can do for him who possess it. Altogether the work is one which strongly appeals to a lover of men, and very heartening to us who have sown so much and reaped so little.

It has been a great pleasure to be able to help a little in an effort with which we are in such thorough sympathy. That little has consisted in giving evening lectures at the various centres, and an occasional Bible talk. The former is not the task it might appear, as what they usually want is the one thing we can do most easily—talk about the Arabs and our experiences among them. These soldier lads are most of them just out from home, and form a most attentive audience, sometimes very keen to pick up new ideas. I find that I can get in much of straight missionary appeal; in fact, I have been asked to do it; and I hope that some of our hearers will return home with the impression that the Arab is really worth while, and that something can be done for him other than fight him.

There is a constantly shifting personnel here at the base, and I expect our same story may be retold many times. I myself consider that I am fortunate in being able to draw upon my experiences in Oman as well as Mesopotamia, the two places being so far separated and so different that there is little danger of repetition. The story of how we gained a foothold here in Busrah, in the face of the Turkish opposition of the early days, seems also to hold their attention.

We have also accepted invitations to visit the Y. M. C. A. centres up the Tigris and the Euphrates, Mr. Moerdyk going to Nasariyeh and I to Amara. My last trip up the Tigris to Amara was in 1898, and you can imagine how interesting it was for me to renew my acquaintance with river and town. These ancient rivers do not change much in nineteen years even in war time, but on the banks were seen many evidences, not of the destruction which usually accompanies fighting, but of the progress which here at least follows it. On the right bank we could see for most of the way the new railway, and many of the old villages well known to us by name, including Ezra's Tomb, are now stations on the line. There are a few soldiers to be seen here and there, but perhaps not more than the Turks kept for watching the Arabs. The country looked peaceful enough with the same little collections of mat huts and grazing herds, and seemingly the same little naked boys running along the banks begging for something to be thrown them from the steamer's decks, the only difference being that now they have a few words of English and Hindustani, and expect silver instead of copper. The trip up the river was a very slow one, as our little oil-burning steamer was heavily weighted by large barges on each side, and we had to tie up along the banks for hours at a time on difficult stretches to allow other boats to come along and pass us on their way downstream. It was impressive to note the large number of steamers going

and coming, all small, of course, but their smoke was never absent from the horizon.

Amara was in the same transitional stage as Busrah, only there, as the native town came right down to the river bank, the changes—new buildings, new signs, and new people—were more pronounced. My stay was but for a few days, as I wished to be away from Busrah only one Sunday. Amara was still a long distance from the front, and the work of the Y. M. C. A. there was about what it is at Busrah, excepting that the soldier population may not be so changing, giving them a chance to see more of the individual units. I was the guest of the Y. M. C. A. people, and enjoyed their hospitality and fellowship very much, as well as my evening meetings at their several centres, and was truly sorry when I had to hurry back to Busrah. Our own mission work at Amara has been kept going during both Turkish and British occupation, and our Bible-shop there is, I think, one of the best in our field.

There were nearly a dozen Y. M. C. A. centres beyond Amara when I was there, reaching right up to the fighting line, and now as I write they have gone on with the troops to Baghdad and beyond, taking with them much of practical sympathy and helpfulness, very much to commend the Gospel of our Lord. When the whole story of the Army Y. M. C. A. work in Mesopotamia is told, it will reveal much of sacrifice and heroism, of quiet endurance and faith, of wisdom and statesmanship, and finally of many consecrated gifts from those whose spiritual sight could see these fields white for the harvest.



BUSRAH CANAL

## "S. O. S."

By C. STANLEY G. MYLREA, M.D.



DR. MYLREA ON A SHIP OF THE DESERT

*On the march to Subahyeh,  
December 18, 1917.*

*Dear Mylrea:—*

*I am on my way back seedy; have had fever for five days and feel awfully weak—chills. Perhaps you could come out to meet me at Subahyeh or on the way. I'm in a funk that I may not be able to make Kuweit, if I get any weaker. The fever won't leave me, and I've come to a full stop two days' march south of Subahyeh. Could you send me some Englishman if you can't come yourself? Am wandering part of the time. Bring a small tent with you—I have plenty of provisions.*

*Yours sincerely,*

*R. E. A. H.*

It was a cold winter's night for Kuwait and I was sitting in front of a nice fire about 8:30 o'clock when there was a loud knocking at the gate. "Who's ill now?" I thought, as I left the house to investigate. "May Allah make your evening good, I have brought you a letter from

the Colonel Sahib. Fast camel riders have but now come in from the desert with despatches for the Sheikh—this letter was among them, and I was bade deliver it with all speed.”

A letter from the Colonel Sahib! We had been expecting him back from the interior for some days, but did not know just how he was coming. Was he merely letting me know that he was almost home? On reading the letter, however, my first expectation was quickly dispelled. The Colonel was out there in the desert, alone, four days' march away; no doctor with him, no one to whom he could even speak English. The fearful loneliness of his position burned itself into my very soul as I stood there at the gate, a gale from the north howling round me, reminding me what the desert, the open desert, must be like at that moment. “I must see the Sheikh's secretary,” I said to the messenger. “Wait for me while I get a hat.” In a few minutes we were off to the secretary's house; we found him at home evidently expecting me. “Well,” I said, after the usual greetings, “when can we start?” “Oh! The day after to-morrow,” he replied quite naturally. “The day after to-morrow!” I cried. “The Sahib is ill. We must leave here to-morrow morning.” “I'm afraid it can't be done,” answered the secretary; “the camels must be got ready—tents and provisions must be collected. But we'll try.” “Can we see the Sheikh?” I suggested. “Possibly; we can go to the palace, but I fear we shall find that the Sheikh has retired for the night. Like his father, may Allah have mercy upon him, he goes to bed early.” It turned out as the secretary had feared—the Sheikh was not to be seen. So I did the only thing possible, made an appointment to see him next morning at sunrise, asked the secretary to speed up preparations as much as he could, and went home.

The Sheikh received me the next morning with the assurance that the Colonel was not very ill; he had questioned the men who had brought the letter. He had probably been able to travel on and might be within two days of Kuwait by this time. “Would I start to-morrow?” I said that I should like to start as soon as I could get ready. “You can start whenever you wish,” assented the Sheikh; so after a few minutes' conversation and some coffee I rose to go, leaving instructions for the caravan to come out to my house as soon as it was ready.

It was about noon when we rode away from Kuwait. Our caravan consisted of twelve camels and ten men, besides myself and including the two men who had ridden in with the Colonel's letter to me. These two men were fine specimens of the desert man, Rejaan and Aamr. I questioned them as to their ride in. “When did you leave the Colonel?” “Two days ago,” was the reply. “We were only one night on the road. By Allah! It was a terrible journey—rain, hail, thunder and lightning; our clothes wet through, our bodies worn out. We wished to die.” “My camel”—it was Rejaan who was speaking—“left camp with a fine big hump; he arrived in Kuwait with none—his

heart was broken, he was finished." "Your camel was no good," said Aamr, "mine didn't feel it. See. This is she, going back none the worse. She would do the journey over again under the same conditions and would take no harm." He patted the camel with his cane as he made the boast.

Outside the city we halted at some wells to fill the waterskins. This took about half an hour. Then we rode on till the sun was nearing the horizon and the sea had disappeared from view. I had asked the Sheikh for one small tent, but two large ones had been provided. The one the men put up for my accommodation that night was a most elaborate affair, a tent within a tent, four-square, and lined with fantastic embroidery, reminding one of the specimens of tent work that tourists buy in Cairo. The inner tent was twelve feet square, and I was told the whole thing was worth \$1,000 and was Persian work. As soon as my tent was up—an operation which was performed with a rapidity that rather surprised me—the men put up their own simple single-fly tent. In the meantime some of them had gathered a large quantity of desert brushwood and a fine fire was soon roaring to the skies. This fire served to cook dinner and to keep every one warm—it was amusing to watch the men sticking their bare feet into the flames and take no harm. This desert brushwood is a wonderful provision of nature; it is to be found growing almost everywhere in Arabia and furnishes pasture for the camels and firewood for man. In Kuwait it is the most popular form of firewood.

By this time the camels had grazed to their satisfaction and came running up to the camp begging for their evening meal of dates—in their importunity they fell over tent ropes and got in every one's way, with the result that fluent curses were rained upon them. A little later they were all couched in front of the men's tent receiving their portion with evident relish. You remember Kendrick Bang's definition of the camel? "The camel is a lumpy sort of a beast with pneumatic feet and a hare lip." It is a very good definition as far as it goes, but in reality the camel is a magnificent animal, without whose presence life in the desert would be impossible. He is one of the two essentials for existence in Arabia—the other one being the date.

At least two hours before sunrise I was awakened by the sound of some one pounding coffee. I was soon up myself and having my breakfast. By the time I had finished, the camp was ready to move on, with the exception of packing up my tent, which was all done in some twenty minutes. The morning was cold, and every one was glad when the sun's rays were high enough to be felt. We rode till noon, passing many miles away to our right, a large caravan of camels bound for the Nejd, and grazing as they went. Our halt at noon was only for about twenty minutes, just enough for the men to observe the noon prayer and make the inevitable coffee. Not far off was a small hill perhaps two hundred feet high, a conspicuous enough object in the

desert, and we had been riding towards it for hours. I now noticed two Arab shepherds standing on its summit, their figures sharply silhouetted against the clear sky. They, too, were performing the noon prayer, and one could not but be touched by their simple and at the same time artistic piety. Robert Hichens, in his "Garden of Allah," makes one of his characters say, "I love to see men praying in the desert." There is no doubt that in their way these childish, cheerful, hardy and enduring Bedouins live very close to Allah.

By late afternoon we were in sight of the small expanse of bare plain where the wells of Subahyeh are situated. There is nothing to remind one of Walter Scott's oasis in the desert, with its date palms and crystal water. Picture a lonely, muddy, filthy spot, littered with the leavings of a thousand caravans and pierced with three wells containing what I should think must be the dirtiest water in Arabia, for the mind can conceive of nothing dirtier. Three or four sinister-looking vultures gloated over the scene, completing the utter desolation of the landscape. I decided to camp as far away from the place as possible.

We had not been on the march long the next morning when we espied on our left a caravan making for the wells we had just come away from. My men broke into a shout, "This is the Sahib's party, if Allah will!" and urged the camels into a trot. I was not at all sanguine, for the caravan was quite a small one; but, with the men, it was a case of the wish being father to the thought. The strangers were merely ordinary Bedouins, and like all of the few people we had met since leaving Kuweit, could give us no news of the Colonel. It was now quite evident that he had not moved far from the place where he had written me. "We must push on faster," I said to the head man. He replied that we could move faster if our baggage camels were less heavily loaded. A caravan is like a squadron of cruisers going into action: the pace is set by the slowest, and it is not safe to separate. However, later on in the day we came on a party of shepherds and arranged with them to take care of the large tent, some other unnecessary impedimenta, and the two slowest camels. From then on for most of the time we moved at a steady trot.

That night the weather changed, and we had sharp thunderstorms, accompanied with hail which pounded the tent as if it would punch holes in it. Towards morning my servant came and asked if he might finish the night in my tent, as the men's tent was leaking just where his bed was. Morning broke clear and cold; all round us were pools of water: in fact, in places the desert was a silver sheet. One could not help thinking of the text, "He turneth the wilderness into a standing water." The men hailed the scene with delight, and hastened to fill all waterskins with the sweet, though muddy, water. Not only was it sweet, it was also beautifully soft, and I enjoyed several most excellent washes. It occurred to me that the rain was a fortunate thing for the

Colonel, as his camp was a long way from water. We were still without news of him; in fact, we had seen no one for twenty-four hours. There was a fair amount of life about, but it was the life of the unconscious denizens of the desert. On several occasions we sighted gazelles, now and again a hare darted past us; we even saw a badger, rather a rare animal in the desert. There were a fair number of sand grouse and wild turkeys about, while meadow larks were everywhere. There were plenty of birds I was unable to name.

The perspective of the desert is interesting to one unfamiliar with it. Small elevations are visible from comparatively great distances and appear very much larger than they really are. At one time I had noticed a mound in the distance for at least half an hour, but when I rode up to inspect it, it proved to be only a grave with the earth mounded up to a height of a couple of feet or so. Some one had fallen out on the march and had been buried where he fell. A lonely grave in the desert! Here another delay took place. One of the camels had dropped his load, and I muttered to myself Kipling's lines, "Somebody's load has fell off in the road—Wish it were only mine." It was now noon, and I realized that we must reach the Colonel's camp that night. I arranged, therefore, to push on and let the baggage animals come on after us as best they might. Before long they were far behind and we were covering a good seven miles an hour.

All at once as we topped a rise in the ground a caravan came in view. From the very first it was almost certain that it was the object of our search. I was sorry that I had omitted to bring my field glasses. The caravan consisted of some fifty camels, besides two horses, and a couple of the rather rare Arabian antelope, the Oryx Beatrix. These latter are white except for black patches on the forehead, the underbody and legs being also black. Their horns are long and straight, and the alignment of the horns is so good that in the distance, seen in profile, the animal seems to have only one horn. This has led to the rather far-fetched idea that the Oryx is the unicorn of Job. It is extraordinary what some people will say. As we approached each other I tried to make out which of the riders was the Colonel, but was unable to recognize him, and it was not until we were quite close that in the bearded Arab who now rode towards us I knew my old friend. Evidently he was better or he would not be marching. "It was awfully good of you to come out to me. When did you leave Kuwait?" was his first simple greeting in rather a weak voice. "We have been just seventy-two hours on the road," I replied. "You have done very well," was his comment; "suppose we camp here," he went on; "I think I have ridden enough for to-day." So we camped there and then, and soon he was telling me how the fever finally left him the day previously, and he had broken camp some three or four hours before. The next day was Christmas Day, and in the morning as soon as it was light the whole camp put on its best clothes and visited first the Colonel's tent and then mine, to wish us the equivalent of a Merry Christmas.



That night the Colonel and I had an excellent Christmas dinner—mock turtle soup, sardines, mutton chops and kidneys, roast wild turkey, and a real Christmas pudding from London. We finished up with hot chocolate which the Colonel had made with his own hands. My host was not able to do the same justice to the cheer as was his guest, but still it was something to be able to celebrate the day if only by watching some one else eat.

The ride home was enjoyable but uneventful. It took four days, as we did not hurry. At intervals we were saluted by men who had come out with letters from the Sheikh of Kuwait, asking after our healths, etc. At midday on the last day of our journey, as we approached Kuwait, we saw that a large party of horsemen was coming out to meet us. Later on we could make out that the Sheikh himself, riding a handsome black horse, was heading the cavalcade. Presently the horsemen all wheeled far to one side, and then with tremendous shouts of "Welcome! Welcome!" they rode across our path at full gallop, firing their rifles at the same time. Our party stood still, acknowledging the salute by firing its rifles into the air. After this every one dismounted, and there was a general handshaking and exchange of greetings. This over, we remounted and proceeded on our way, the Sheikh and his horsemen going on in front and acting as escort. We were still some distance from home, and as we closed in on the town, the Sheikh allowed his party to get a long way ahead of us, while we on our part turned aside for a cup of tea at my house. The final acts in the day's drama were the call on the Sheikh at his palace and a reception given by the Colonel to all his men at his residence. The men consumed Christmas cakes and coffee, smoked cigarettes and withdrew. Last of all I withdrew, having been away from home exactly one week.

## Newly Appointed Missionaries

The following new missionaries were appointed to the Arabian Mission during the past year: Mrs. Sharon J. Thoms; Louis P. Dame, M.D., and his fiancée, Miss Elizabeth Purdie; Walter Norman Leak, M.D.

Mrs. Thoms needs no introduction to our constituency because of her previous identification with the work of the Arabian Mission, which she left shortly after the tragic accidental death of her husband, Dr. Sharon J. Thoms, in 1913. One cannot but admire the Christian fortitude and devotion which led her to seek reappointment to the field in which she labored side by side with her husband. The three children will remain in this country for educational purposes.

Unfortunately the three other appointees are prevented from going to the field this year on account of the call to National Service. Dr. Leak is a graduate of Cambridge University and is in the service of the British Army in Egypt. Dr. Dame has served an internship in the Presbyterian Hospital in San Juan, Porto Rico. He expected to terminate this connection in June and enter military service July 1st. He writes: "So long as I am in military service, you must not expect me to enter mission work. When once in, I am going to stay till the finish."

We hope this awful war will soon have been fought to a finish that will mean the crushing of the autocratic powers in the field against us, and that these lives and many others looking toward service on the foreign field may be released for work in the country in which, by reason of the banishment of the Turk, the opportunity for the propagation of the Gospel will be very much greater than ever before.



LOUIS P. DAME, M.D.  
Chicago, Ill.  
*Medical College  
University of Illinois, '17*



ELIZABETH PURDIE  
Chicago, Ill.  
*Chicago Normal College, '08  
Moody Bible Institute*



MRS. SHARON J. THOMS  
Indianapolis, Ind.  
*College of Missions, '17  
Kennedy School of Missions, '18*

Mrs. Thoms returned to America on the death of her husband in 1913, and now courageously returns to her work.

# Missionary Personalia



**Rev. James Cantine** has been invited by the British Civil and Military authorities to visit the troops between Basrah and Bagdad stationed along the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. His messages will be conveyed through the agency of the Y.M.C.A., which has army huts along this far Eastern front of the British Army.

**Dr. Samuel M. Zwemer** has spent the summer busily at Mission Fests in the Western territory of our Church and at Conferences of the United Presbyterians. His itinerary for the coming winter will be a heavy one under the auspices of the Laymen's Missionary Movement on whose invitation and at whose expense he has come to this country for the winter.

**Rev. John Van Ess** has written a series of articles for the illustrated magazine, "Asia," which are now appearing in that very attractive periodical.

**Dr. Sarah L. Hosmon** reached her home in June after a long voyage from Arabia during which she encountered the usual delays of present uncertain travel.

**Miss Gertrud Schafheitlin** has also reached her home in Nova Scotia after similar experiences of delay in travel.





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